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Denominational Privilege —and— Denominational Obligation

Rev. Robert M. Martin



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AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY
UNION, TREMONT TEMPLE

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Denominational Privilege and Denominational Obligation

PROVIDENTIAL guidance is more easily traced in the careers of some persons and organizations than of others. The divine hand is plainly seen in the foreign mission work of our Baptist churches. God honored us in making the English Baptists the pioneers of the modern missionary movement under the leadership of Carey, whom Mr. George Smith calls the greatest missionary since Paul. It was a notable providence which brought our American Baptist foreign missionary society into being. Who but God would have planned the conversion of Judson and Rice to Baptist views, while they, on different ships, were sailing to India to begin a work in distant lands to which they had called the Congregationalists who sent them? Happy men, Judson and Rice, to have had so conspicuous a part in the formation of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions and of the American Baptist Missionary Union!

The Baptists followed God's pillar of cloud, when we organized our foreign missionary society in 1814. The pillar of cloud led us also to our first field of foreign labor. Judson was limited to one

ship sailing from Madras, on which he could leave the inhospitable domain of the East India Company. That ship going to Rangoon carried Judson against his own choice to Burma, the country of God's choice. We were beckoned to Assam by its English Commissioner, Capt. Francis Jenkins, whose finger, we must believe, in view of the achievements in that field, was the finger of God. The God who gave us Judson and Rice from an unexpected quarter, made us yet another gift quite as noteworthy, when by the hand of Dr. and Mrs. Guinness, in 1884, the Livingstone Inland Mission on the Congo, with six stations and twenty-five missionaries, was transferred to our Missionary Union, a transaction without a parallel in missionary annals.

The providence which so plainly assigned our tasks has generously bestowed prosperity. We have today in Burma 39,065 communicants. Mention of the triumphs of Christianity in the regions beyond may not fail to give prominent place to the signal grace of God bestowed on us in the furtherance of the gospel among the Karens of Burma, who have flocked to our missionaries, seeking the Redeemer of their dreams. Our Teluguland, which after thirty years of almost fruitless toil was "the lone star" of the Baptists in India proper, whose light was several times in danger of extinction, has now 58,418 baptized Christians. We remember the Pentecostal summer of 1878,

when natural famine gendered spiritual plenty, and one brief month and a half witnessed the baptism of 8,691 persons, 2,222 in one day. Not unmindful of the marvelous missionary achievements in the Fiji Islands, in Hawaii, in Japan, and even in Madagascar, we may perhaps record the victory of the gospel in Teluguland as the crown of glory in the modern missionary enterprise. Even yet without abatement our Telugu Zion is going from strength to strength, the largest, and perhaps the most hopeful field under the care of any body of Christians on the whole earth. In its fields in Asia and Africa the American Baptist Missionary Union has 112,163 communicants, a conquest of souls from heathenism far exceeding that of any other missionary society anywhere,—a conquest not won by Baptists, but granted them by the gracious heart of God.

To ascertain our Missionary Union's place of privilege on the foreign field let us compare the results of its endeavor with the results of the five other societies of our own country, which made the largest pecuniary contributions to foreign work according to the reports of 1899-1900. Far be it from a Baptist to enter into this comparison in any spirit of vain-glory. The statistics themselves will show that according to standards of human measurement the larger fruitage should have been gathered by others rather than by us. With humiliation, not with boastfulness, the inquiry is pursued.

The five organizations in the estimate with our own are, in the order of the amounts contributed, the Methodist Episcopal (North), the Presbyterian (North), the Congregational, the Protestant Episcopal, and the Disciples. Note that the estimate excludes the work of any of these agencies in European countries. The Methodist contributions were nearly twice as large as ours. The combined amounts of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists were almost three times as large. The five societies contributed six times as much money as our Missionary Union. They have four and a half times as many American workers in foreign lands. Yet our Union's increase of members for the year reported, was more than half the increase of the five other societies, about 52.8 per cent (15,690—8,283). Our Union also reports a total of more than half as many communicants as the five societies together, about 55.4 per cent (189,638—105,212).

No man will assert that this advantage has come to the Missionary Union because of any superiority in our spirit, in our agents, or in our methods. There was probably as much consecration in the gifts of our brethren, as much devotion and ability in their workers, and as much wisdom in their methods. The figures demonstrate that we have not merited these large returns. Who may attribute our prosperity to any source but to the inscrutable ordering and the mysterious

grace of Him who holds in his hands the seven stars? Not to our brethren discredit, and to us praise; but to the divine name the glory.

While, moreover, the Baptists of the United States have been doing something for the heathen, they have grown from a hundred thousand or less to about four million, four hundred thousand at home. By reason of our signal favor from the Most High we are not to count ourselves the favorites of heaven. We are rather to reflect that high privilege imposes deep obligation. This blessing should stir us to gratitude and praise. Heaven's loving kindness should win us to love and devotion. Great reward, undeserved, should bring us to humility. We shall show ourselves renegade, if gracious exaltation does not induce to a sense of serious responsibility. Unto whom much is given, of him is much required. We shall not mistake in accounting God's goodness as his loud call to more strenuous service, more service in money, more service in men.

What now is the Baptist response to the divine entreaty? It may not be said that we have turned a deaf ear. In the decade closing with 1891 the annual receipts of our Missionary Union from all sources averaged less than \$375,000; whereas in the last decade the receipts averaged nearly \$600,000 (\$599,172). In the previous decade the average of male missionaries sent out was eleven; in the last de-

cade the average was thirteen and five-tenths. This is progress; but not the progress worthy of our blessings or commensurate with the demands of the work. While the advancing cause has required enlargement, our laggard giving has necessitated retrenchment in recent years. New doors open to us in vast, untouched realms of darkness; few are entered. The name of the Philippines springs from the lips of us all, but that is a door into which we were thrust. In this new day we confront an anomaly. Once we prayed for open doors and men. Now, doors are open, and men are begging to be permitted to enter; while a meagre treasury keeps them begging. Money is cheaper than men and generally is easier to obtain, but alas! the covetousness of the many now fetters feet which long to be on the mountains to bring glad tidings, to publish peace.

A goodly heritage is our Baptist fellowship, and nobly worthy of the respect of us all; though at one thing some Baptist cheeks redden and some Baptist hearts beat low. That one thing is the feebleness of our answer to urgent calls of God for the best investment of money; that one thing, that with inappreciation and distrust and on halting foot we follow the ark of Jehovah. O, the sin and the shame of it in view of heaven's exceptional grace to us, superadded to the grace which shines upon all in "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

Jesus Christ"! Our denomination's privilege is our denomination's obligation. Receiving more than others should find its meet adornment in giving more than others; the giving, of course, not of human measurement, but of divine, the first giving of the "willing mind, which is accepted, according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not." We are called into the kingdom for such a time as this. If we rise not to our task of honor, we need not be surprised if with shame and confusion of face we see another people, more faithful than ourselves, chosen by God to bring deliverance to the unevangelized whom we neglected.

The law of rivers is that they shall increase their volume of water as they approach their mouth. Some recent writer has noted the fact that the river Nile violates this law. Its waters diminish from a point a thousand miles above its mouth. The thirsty sands make exacting draughts on the mighty stream. Nature, in apparent resentment at the transgression of the Nile, has withheld tributaries for the last eleven hundred miles of its course.

"There is a sea, which day by day
Receives the rippling rills [plains,
And streams, which spring from sunny
Or fall from cedared hills.
But what it thus receives it gives
With glad and generous hand;

And a stream more wide with a fuller
Flows down from land to land. [tide
But doth it lose by giving? Nay,
Its shores of beauty see
The life and health and fruitful wealth
Of Galilee.

“There is a sea which day by day
Receives a fuller tide;
But what it gains it keeps, nor gives
To shore nor sea beside.
What gains its grasping greed?
Behold, barrenness round its shore;
Its fruit of lust, like apples of dust,
Rotten from rind to core;
Its Jordan water turned to brine
Lies heavy as molten lead,
And its dreadful name doth e’er proclaim
That sea is dead.”

Denominational privilege is denominational obligation. Failure to meet our obligation will be dishonor in the sight of other churches and in the sight of the world. Failure to rise to our high privilege will be humiliation in the eye of our gracious Lord, who will mourn over us, “How often would I, and ye would not!” To meet our obligation will be high privilege glorified.

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